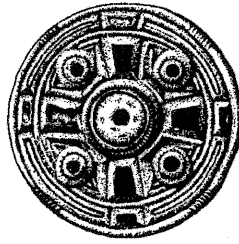


UNTIL ORIGINAL
TURNS UP



Archaeological Field Unit

Roman Remains at Glendower, Mill Common, Huntingdon

Spencer Cooper

February 2003

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A220

Commissioned by Fauxward Homes Ltd

Roman Remains at Glendower , Mill Common, Huntingdon

Spencer Cooper

2003

Editor: Judith Roberts

Illustrator: Crane Begg



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©Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

Arch.Field.Unit@libraries.camcnty.gov.uk
<http://www.camcnty.gov.uk/library/afu/index.htm>
<http://www.archaeology.freewire.co.uk>

SUMMARY

On the 4th of February 2003 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 440 square metres of land to the rear of Glendower, Mill Common, Huntingdon (NGR TL 23714 71304) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development involved the construction of a single dwelling. The project was commissioned by Fauxward Homes Ltd. The work was carried out in accordance with a specification (dated 14.01.03) prepared by the AFU in response to a brief for an archaeological evaluation issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council.

The evaluation has identified significant Roman riverside activity which may be related to a Roman villa less than 100m to the west, at Whitehills. A large channel, or a series of channels, which contained Roman building material was identified in Trench 1.

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Roman Remains at Glendower , Mill Common, Huntingdon

(TL 23714 71304)

1 INTRODUCTION

On the 4th of February 2003 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken on 440 square metres of land to the rear of Glendower, Mill Common, Huntingdon (NGR TL 23714 71304) by staff of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposed development involved the construction of a single dwelling. The project was commissioned by Fauxward Homes Ltd. The work was carried out in accordance with a specification (dated 14.01.03) prepared by the AFU in response to a brief for an archaeological evaluation issued by Andy Thomas of the Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeological (Planning Application H/01/01029/FUL and H02 00011FUL).

From the outset the potential for finding archaeological remains was considered highly likely due to its position within a landscape which is extremely rich in archaeological remains. An evaluation to the east (Cooper and Spoerry, 2000) revealed extensive Iron Age, Roman and medieval remains. Less than 100m to the west at Whitehills excavations between 1967 and 1969 (Davison and Rudd unpub) identified a Roman villa (with a mosaic floor) and a Saxon cemetery.

2 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Glendower, Mill Common, Huntingdon lies on the north bank of the Alconbury Brook immediately upstream of its confluence with the River Great Ouse. The development area was located on an escarpment which overlooked the Alconbury Brook. The geology of the site is Oxford Clay overlaid by alluvium. The site lies at approximately 10m AOD.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prehistoric Background

The subject site is within the Ouse Valley which is rich in prehistoric remains. During the late Neolithic and Bronze Age major ritual complexes sprang up and evolved along the course of the Ouse and, although much of the material



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Figure 1 Location of Trenches with Development Area outlined.

culture does not survive, these monuments are highly visible from the air as crop marks. These ceremonial complexes cover extensive territories and are distributed evenly across the landscape (Malim, 2000).

Late Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonial complexes are commonly respected by Iron Age settlement activity which appears to occupy lands away from the river system. This is probably as a result of episodic flooding and alluviation along the Ouse during the Iron Age and Roman periods.

Within Huntingdon artefacts of prehistoric (largely of Neolithic and Bronze Age) date have been reported to the SMR. The presence of such artefacts is unsurprising given the preference of early prehistoric populations to use low lying gravels. The major late Neolithic ceremonial complex at Rectory Farm, Godmanchester (about 1km to the south-east of the development area) is a good example of this. The site consisted of a rectilinear "horned" ditch enclosure (approximately 6.3ha) with an internal bank and 24 posts arranged regularly along the perimeter. Radio-carbon dates from the site suggests a late Neolithic date of between 5050 ±80BP and ±4850 80BP. Excavations by the AFU south of the enclosure indicate that the activities associated with the monument were of a wide spread nature (Hinman and Kenney, 1998).

To the west of Huntingdon lies the late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceremonial complex of Brampton. Mortuary enclosures, cursus monuments and ring ditches have been identified.

Within the general vicinity of the subject site an Iron Age presence has been identified. At Godmanchester a series of Early Iron Age farmsteads or hamlets have been located at intervals along the gravel terrace. (Green, 1977).

One such farmstead has been sample excavated just east of the town (Wait 1992). Further evidence of Iron Age activity is known from modern Godmanchester with typical roundhouses and ditched enclosures encountered below Roman occupation (Green op. cit.).

Roman

Several authors have made attempts to identify the line of Ermine Street between Godmanchester and the northern edge of Huntingdon. It is most likely that Ermine Street lies close by and probably to the east. The site therefore lies in the roadside zone where various remains include an *agger*, chance losses, burials and occasional structures may lie. The Roman period SMR entries imply that a range of activities were carried on in the area. The presence of an excavated villa (SMR 2545) to the west of the site, at Whitehills, implies that further, related, remains may be present here.

Excavation revealed first century Roman occupation and an associated series of ditches, a second century timber structure with a mortared floor and a Roman corridor villa, perhaps of early third century construction.

Early Medieval

The location of the documented Danish and late Saxon burhs (the latter being a re-build or extension of the former) is not known. Recent work (Spoerry 2000) has attempted to re-assess the evidence to provide the best possible indication of the location and extent of Danish and Saxon burhs, and the extent of late Saxon occupation. This process eventually resulted in the very substantial town, documented by Domesday survey. The survey refers to twenty properties cleared to make way for the Castle; implying that the development site (next to the castle) was within an area that included late Saxon urban properties.

A late Saxon church and burial ground was also found at Whitehills. This suggests that the main area of pre-Conquest Saxon settlement was a zone from the later High Street (in the east) to the end of Mill Common in the west, where an earthwork, known as the bar dyke, probably represents part of the Saxon burh defences. In addition, by analogy with other sites, the most likely location for the Danish defended area would be the D-shaped enclosure around the river crossing, which at this time was still Ermine Street.

In conclusion this site may include part of the western defences of the Danish burh, and part of the late Saxon town, probably well within the early medieval burghal defences.

Post-conquest medieval remains

The major element in the post-conquest medieval townscape that is relevant here is the castle, built in 1068 and at least partially destroyed in 1174. The imposition of the castle onto the pre-existing Saxon town caused the river crossing to be moved, resulting in the construction of a wooden bridge and a new position for the High Street and market place.

Post-medieval remains

In the post-medieval period the castle was re-modelled during the Civil War, and this may also have impacted on this site. The proximity of wind mills and the route to the water mill, shown in the 1572 survey and subsequent maps, may have some significance for this site. The general picture is very much of a town that is much less densely populated than in the preceding centuries. This may have been a period when the site was less actively used.

Recent archaeological work

The most relevant published archaeological work to the subject site was the evaluation undertaken at Watersmeet (Cooper and Spoerry, 2000). The results from the evaluation revealed significant late Iron Age/Roman and medieval

remains within the development area. The first century Iron Age or Roman remains may represent roadside activity alongside Ermine Street. The riverside occupation may eventually have culminated in the nearby villa site. The medieval remains consist of several occupation features, plus a re-working of the riverside escarpment that is almost certainly defensive and probably dates to the post-Conquest period, rather than being part of the Danish or Saxon burgh. It may therefore represent a 'lost' western bailey of the Norman Castle.

4 METHODOLOGY

Before fieldwork the AFU conducted a desktop and cartographic assessment of the development area including a review of historical data, previous archaeological work and an examination of SMR entries.

Two trenches totalling 20.2m in length were excavated using a mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket. Approximately 7.5% of the development area was evaluated (Figures 1 and 2).

Almost 75% of the development area had been occupied by a concrete foundation which was removed before trenching commenced. The concrete block was over a metre deep. Both trenches were located within the footprint of the concrete block. After machining was completed each trench was photographed and recorded using the AFU standard recording system. It should be noted that recording and excavation was severely hampered by the large amounts of groundwater present in both trenches.

5 RESULTS (Fig. 1)

General

A significant amount of Roman building material, including tegulae and box tile, was recovered from Roman ditches and channels. A north-south ditch was observed in Trench 1, which produced Roman tile and post-medieval pottery. The overburden in both trenches was over 1m deep.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was an L-shaped trench located in the centre of the development area. On its north-south axis it was 12.6m long and varied in depth from 0.8m to 1m. On an east-west alignment the trench was 2.3m long and 0.85m deep.

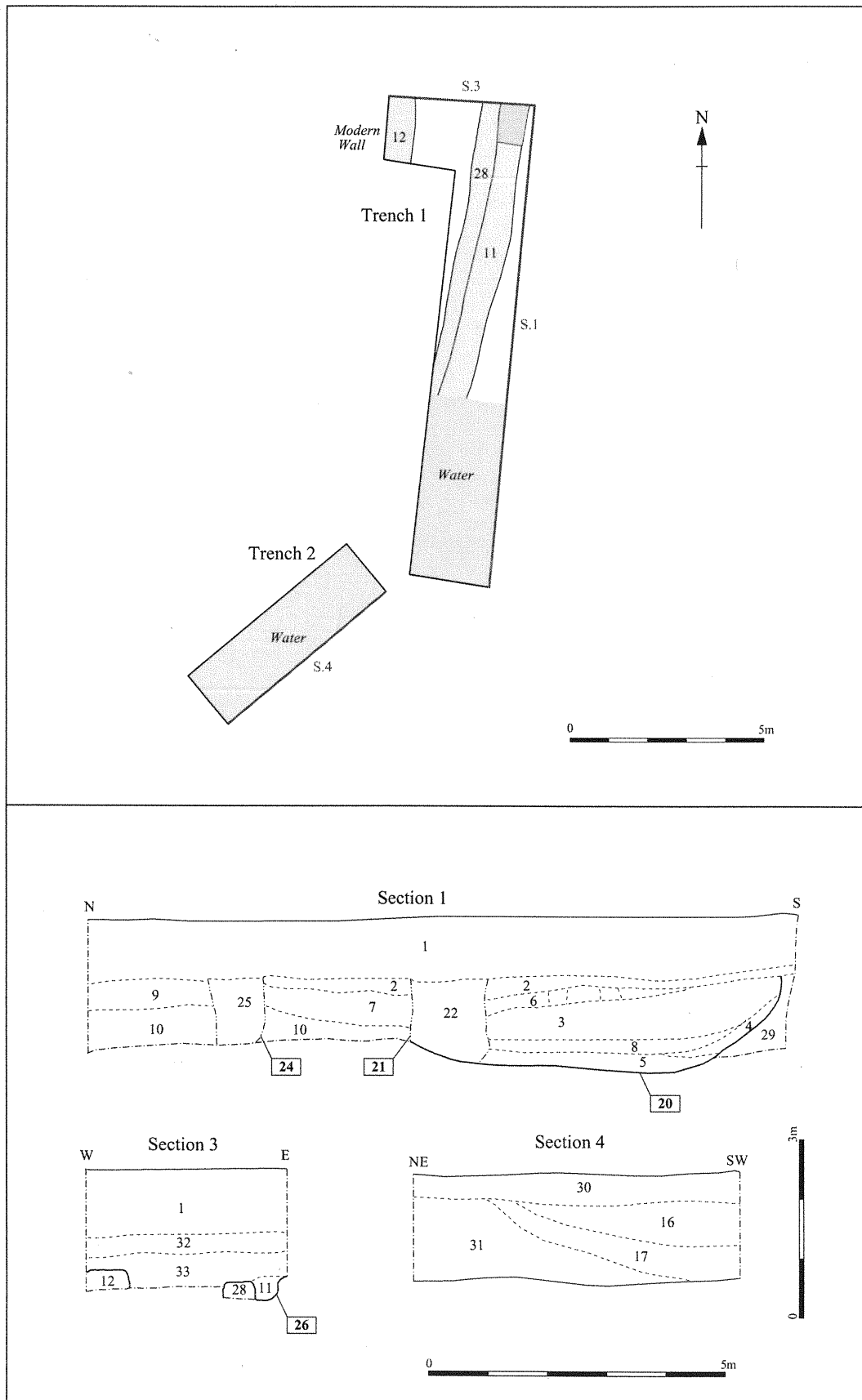


Figure 2 Trench Plans and Sections

West Facing Section (Section 1)

Layer 1 was 1m deep and composed of a black silty clay which contained a large quantity of modern brick and other building material. Layer 2 was 0.30m thick and consisted of modern gravel foundation material. Below layer 2 was layer 6 (0.30m thick) was made up of modern brick rubble.

Ditch **20** was observed in the west facing section and may represent a Roman channel. It contained at least four fills 3, 4, 8 and 5.

Fill 3 was a dark grey silty clay (0.65m thick). Finds recovered from fill 3 include Roman box tile, roof tile, Nene Valley colour coated pottery (third century) and fragments of animal bone.

Fill 8 was a dark brown grey silty clay which was 0.25m deep.

Fill 4 was a brown grey silty clay with frequent gravel.

Fill 5 was dark humic silty clay which was 0.25m deep.

Ditch **20** truncated layer 29. Layer 29 was a dark greyish brown silty clay (0.55m thick). No artefactual material was recovered from this fill.

Deposits 7 and 10 may be fills in ditch **20** but it was difficult to ascertain due to a rising water table. Layer 7 was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.59m thick. Roman roof tile, box tile and a fragment of shelly ware were recovered from layer 7. Layer 10 was a light brownish silty clay (0.30m). Deposits 2, 7 and 10 were truncated by cut **24**.

Cut **21** was 0.90m deep and was a modern foundation cut for a wall. Cut **21** contained a single fill 22, which was composed of silty clay with frequent modern brick fragments. Ditch **20** was truncated by cut **21**.

Cut **24** may represent a post-medieval foundation trench for a brick building. Cut **24** was 0.9m deep and 0.70m wide and contained a single fill 25. Fill 25 was composed of silty clay with frequent brick fragments. This foundation trench cut layer 9, a greenish grey silty clay (0.40m thick) and layer 10 (see above).

North Facing Section (not illustrated)

Layer 13 was a greyish brown silty clay which was 0.50m thick and contained modern brick.

Layer 14 was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.32m thick and may be fluvial in origin.

Layer 19 was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.20m deep and may be fluvial in origin.

South Facing Section (Section 3)

In the northern part of the trench a north-east-south-west aligned ditch **26** was revealed. Ditch **26** was 0.70m wide and contained a single fill **11**. This ditch was not fully excavated due to rising water. Fill **11** was a greenish grey silty clay which produced Roman tile, medieval pottery and post-medieval pottery. Ditch **26** was cut by a foundation trench **28**. Foundation trench **28** contained mortar and machine made bricks. In the east-west extension of the evaluation trench a Victorian wall **12**, running on a north-south alignment, was identified.

These features were sealed by layers **32** and **33**. Layer **32** was modern demolition material (0.30m thick). Layer **33** was a dark grey silty clay (0.60m thick). These layers may be equivalent to layers **9** and **10** respectively (see Section 1, above).

Trench 2

Trench **2** was 5.3m long and varied in depth from 1.6m to 1.1m. It was located on a north-east-south-west alignment and no archaeological features were recognised in plan due to the high water table. A number of deposits were observed within the sections.

North-west Facing Section (Section 4)

Layer **30** was a greyish brown silty clay which was 0.50m deep and contained modern brick.

Layer **16** was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.34m deep and may be fluvial in origin.

Layer **17** was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.61m deep and may be fluvial in origin.

Layer **31** was a dark grey brown silty clay (0.71m thick)

South-east Facing Section (not illustrated)

Layer **30** was a greyish brown silty clay which was 0.50m deep and contained modern brick.

Layer **18** was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.61m deep and may be fluvial in origin.

Layer **19** was a dark grey silty clay which was 0.59m deep and may be fluvial in origin.

6 DISCUSSION

The stratigraphic sequence revealed in both trenches has identified post-medieval and Roman activity. Ditch 20 and its associated fills 3, 8, 4 and 5 may represent a man-made channel or a palaeochannel. These deposits may indicate riverside activity associated with the villa uncovered at Whitehills in the 1960s. Box tile and roof tile suggest a high status building nearby such as a villa.

Post-medieval activity is represented by upper deposits 1, 6, 2 and 9 which were observed in Trenches 1 and 2. In addition a Victorian wall, 12, and a post-medieval ditch, 26, were observed in the southern part of Trench 1.

It is very difficult to interpret deposits observed in Trench 2. Deposits 16 and 17 may represent fills of a man-made channel. No artefacts were recovered from these deposits.

7 CONCLUSION

The location of the site is of particular interest when considering development of Roman activity within the Ouse Valley and in particular along the Alconbury Brook. The archaeological investigations (Watersmeet, Whitehills and Glendower, Mill Common) along the north bank of the Alconbury Brook show that there is extensive occupation from the late Iron Age through to the late Roman period. This evidence suggests that the notion that Huntingdon was a suburb of Godmanchester will have to be reevaluated. It might be the case that Roman occupation within the Huntingdon area was more intensive than previously thought.

The artefacts recovered from this evaluation included box tile, imbrex and tegulae, which suggest that there is a large Roman villa or high status building in the vicinity of the development area. The nearest known building of any status is the Whitehills villa. The Roman deposits identified in the evaluation may represent riverside activity linked to the Whitehills villa.

No Saxon or medieval archaeology was encountered in the evaluation which was surprising considering the high potential for finding remains of this date. This may be due to the more ephemeral nature of remains of this period or the high level of truncation across the site. Further work in the development area may rectify this situation.

The features in the northern part of the site to relate to a post-medieval structure and drains which appear to run down the the ditch in the southern part of the trench.

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The Brief for archaeological evaluation was written by Andy Thomas, Principal Archaeologist (Landscape Planning), and the evaluation was monitored by Kasia Gdaniec (Development Control Officer).

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Drawing Conventions

Sections

Limit of Excavation	-----
Cut	—————
Cut - Conjectured	-----
Soil Horizon	-----
Soil Horizon - Conjectured	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Top of Natural	—————
Top Surface	—————
Break in Section	-----
Cut Number	118
Deposit Number	117
Ordnance Datum	$\frac{18.45m}{X}$ ODN

Plans

Limit of Excavation	—————
Deposit - Conjectured	-----
Natural Features	-----
Intrusion/Truncation	-----
Sondages/Machine Strip	-----
Illustrated Section	————— S.14
Deposit	
Modern Feature	
Excavated Slot	
Cut Number	118



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The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946